

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 13, 2005

His Excellency Victor Yushchenko
President of Ukraine
Kiev, Ukraine

Dear President Yushchenko:

As an ardent admirer of the recent democratic triumphs you spearheaded in Ukraine, I regret that I must write today to express my profound dismay over the recent desecration of an ancient Jewish cemetery in Chortkov, Ukraine. As you are likely aware, the historical significance of this cemetery to the Jewish community in Chortkov is immense, as it is the oldest resting place for generations of local Jews dating back to the early 17th century, including the victims of the Khmel'nitski pogroms. On a personal note, Chortkov was also home to many of my ancestors generations ago, and continues to serve as an important center of learning for the Hasidim.

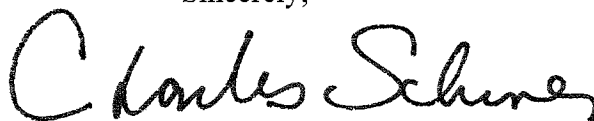
It is my understanding that in late June, a hospital in the city of Chortkov dug up this cemetery to use as a garden. Furthermore, my office has been informed that the Oblast Administration even warned the hospital in April not to proceed with these plans because they would undoubtedly disturb the hallowed ground of this cemetery, a registered historical property. Despite this warning, the hospital proceeded with the digging and it was not until the intervention of local Jewish leaders and community officials that these unlawful actions ceased.

Your Excellency, Mr. President, your dedication to democracy, freedom and human rights for all of Ukraine is unambiguous and has served as an inspiration to the world. Recently, you addressed a Joint Session of Congress, at which you declared that the "60th anniversary of the allied victory over Nazism once again calls upon us to fulfill our obligation to root out any expression of anti-Semitism and xenophobia, to secure minority rights and liberties."

Mr. President, I truly believe in your dedication to each and every citizen of Ukraine and your commitment to ensuring that the rights of all Ukrainians, especially minority groups, are upheld and defended. Therefore, I would like to respectfully call upon you to do everything in your power to rectify this horrific act of desecration. I urge you to take swift action to punish the wrongdoers and to provide the appropriate guidance to all national, municipal and private entities to prevent such actions in the future at this, and other analogous sites of historical and religious significance throughout Ukraine.

I thank you for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate